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ABSTRACT

One of the best models for development of services for young children may be the national effort to develop services for preschool children with handicaps. In the early 1970s, the federal government began the Handicapped Children's Early Education Program, with the purpose of developing a base from which to launch a comprehensive program of services for young handicapped children. The program's underlying objective was the development of an infrastructure to support a major expansion of services. Components of the infrastructure included a network of demonstration programs, support programs for early childhood special educators, and training grant funds to support the work of teacher trainers and entice young people into the field. These efforts resulted in a successful network of early childhood special educators and families. A similar approach should be taken in efforts to expand preschool education for all children. Training initiatives should be combined with research and evaluation to make the most of new personnel preparation efforts. Carefully designed studies should be used to examine relationships between levels of training, quality of experiences available for children, and impact on child development. Efforts of other developed countries to prepare early childhood professionals provide guidance in this area. (RH)

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Professional Development as a Form of Capacity Building

Perhaps one of the best models for development of services for young children is the national effort to develop services for preschool children with handicaps. Beginning in the early 1970's, the Federal government began the Handicapped Children's Early Education Program with the express purpose of developing a base from which to launch a comprehensive program of services for young handicapped children.

The underlying principle was the development of an infrastructure to support a major expansion of services. Included were several components. Of these, I will describe three. First, there was a network of demonstration programs to present models of effective services at the local level, across the country. Several hundred of these model programs have been funded over the years. In addition to serving as programmatic standards of services, they also have bred a network of dedicated and well trained professionals to lead the field. Second, the government funded a network of support programs for early childhood special educators. A national technical assistance center was established to work with the demonstration programs, and a substantial series of research projects was funded to examine the effects of early intervention on children with various handicaps and their families. Finally, training grant funds were provided to support the work of teacher trainers and to entice young people into the field.

The overall result of these efforts is a tremendously successful network of early childhood special educators and families. This network has lobbied at the federal, state and local levels for large increases in funding and services for young children. The result is that as of October of next year, all states will be required to provide services to all handicapped children from the age of 3 up. In addition, children from birth to three have had a dramatic expansion of services, with the prospect of an entitlement to services on the near horizon. Of particular note is the fact that federal legislation now requires services be provided by appropriately trained professionals for children down to birth. A recent opinion by the US Department of Education indicates that where a Master's degree is the expected qualification for services to older children, that this same standard of professional level must be maintained for children younger than 3 years of age.

It is my opinion that we need to take a similar approach to the expansion of services for all preschool children. To date, we have focused our attention on the expansion of funding for direct services to children. It is true that the need for services is great. At the state level we have seen a serious erosion of the quality of services -- particularly for low income families -- since the early 1980's. Even if the child care bill that is now being considered with the budget reconciliation bill becomes

law in its current form, we will have recouped only some of our losses of recent years. We must have a strategy that focuses on the federal role in the strengthening of the capacity of states and localities for providing services. Foundations can play a significant role in this effort. However, it must be clear from the outset that the overall effort required is far beyond the scope of foundation support. Care must be taken that the work of the foundations not be seen as meeting the need for professional development -- even as an excuse for inaction on the part of government. My own view is that foundations should agree to target their resources to a narrow range of issues.

One area that seems to be open in this regard is the development of leadership personnel in early childhood settings. We have only a handful of institutions of higher education which currently are addressing this need. On the East Coast really only three institutions have significant programs underway. The work of the Mailman Foundation in supporting Nova's innovative work in this area is exemplary. We need more such models that can combine the ideals of higher education with the ability to produce a cadre of leadership for the next century. This is but one example of the many ways foundations can be influential in setting the stage for expansion and improvement of early childhood services in the United States.

Does training have an impact on services for young children and in turn on their development?

This question is straightforward and to the point. Do we know the impact of our training efforts on programs for young children? The answer is not so straightforward. Of course we do have some notion that programs with staff with more education -- particularly in areas directly related to care and education of young children -- are regarded as being better for children. The National Day Care Study findings provided support for this conclusion in the late 1970's. This study found that classes supervised by lead teachers with child-related education/training had more appropriate caregiving and had children with greater gains on the Preschool Inventory. The study did not find relationships between general education level and the other variables.

More recently, the National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1990) results indicate that the general education level of caregivers is related to appropriate caregiving behaviors, although the relationship appears to be more complicated than found in the National Day Care Study. In addition, the study results indicated that there was a relationship between teacher behaviors and child developmental status. Other studies appear to support these findings.

A major problem with interpreting the results of these studies is that alternative hypotheses can also be used to

explain the results. For example, parents of children with advanced development would logically be expected to choose both settings which are more developmentally appropriate and which have more highly trained staff.

In order to make well reasoned policy choices regarding the level of training necessary to provide high quality programs for our youngest citizens, we need much more carefully designed studies to examine the relationship among levels of training, quality of experiences available for children and impact on child development. With only occasional exception, researchers have been severely restricted by the lack of anything approaching adequate funding for research in the area.

There has been a quite limited examination of the CDA training funded by ACYF. Peters(1987) reports that most of the work has revolved around the success of trainees in obtaining credentials, acquisition of knowledge of child development by trainees, and changes in the career patterns of trainees. Additional studies have focused on differences in the training programs themselves and on self reports by trainees of the impact of training on their classroom practices and beliefs about those practices. There is some reason to believe that different kinds of training are needed by persons who work with infants and toddlers than is appropriate for persons who work with preschoolers (McCollum, 1987). However these differences are not well understood. It is also believed that training should be guided by both theory and research (Odum, 1987). Little is known about the actual relationship between such training and the behaviors of trained personnel.

To return to comparisons with the government's work with handicapped children, there are 10 national mental retardation research centers funded out of the National Institutes of Health, there are five research institutes funded specifically for studying early childhood special education out of the US Department of Education (including one specifically designed to study personnel preparation issues) as well as a large number of other smaller research projects.

In summary, it is evident that much more research on personnel preparation is needed. That is not to say that we should wait for such research before proceeding with new personnel preparation efforts. Just the opposite is needed. We need to combine new training initiatives with research and evaluation to make the most of the new endeavors.

One way to look for guidance in this area is to examine what other developed countries have done in terms of personnel preparation of early childhood professionals. Tietze (1989) reports that as the preschool availability increased in Europe there was a simultaneous attempt to improve the training level and professional status of preschool teachers. In a number of countries (France, Belgium, the Netherlands, somewhat in Denmark, the United Kingdom, and to a lesser extent in Poland and the USSR)

preschool teachers receive training equivalent to that of primary school teachers. In most other countries the training includes 2-3 years of training after completion of secondary school, typically involving some practical work as part of the training. Most of these countries have established some form of credential or other entry criteria which is required at least for lead teachers. Clearly the US is far behind most other developed countries in terms of the training of preschool teachers, although there is no consistent pattern of training required across countries.